ivingCity

11 1983
VOLUME 22
NOVEMBER

THEOLOGICAL
NOV 03 1983
LIBRARY

Mariapolis '83
COMING HOME!

Page 2

A LIFE OF UNITY
IS THEOLOGY

Page 13

11 1983 VOLUME 22 NOVEMBER

livingCity

2 *MARIAPOLIS '83 — COMING HOME!: An inside look at moments of the five Mariapolises which took place this year in North America and the Caribbean.*

8 *"WORKING FOR A MORE U... WORLD" was the theme of the Mari...*

Sharry Silvi	**Editor**
Anne Lingley	**Managing Editor**
Lucy Comolli	**Art Director**
Doris Revere Peters	**Contributing Editor**
Rosemary Moran James and Kathy Webber	**Article Editors**
Vera Giannini	**Senior Copy Editor**
Richard Tetreau Rosalyn Richardson-Coleman	**Copy Editors**
Longina Briones	**Assistant Art Director**
Philomena Sheridan	**Circulation Manager**
Rolf F. Rehe	**Art Consultant**

Living City is published 11 times a year (10 monthly and a bimonthly issue in August-September) by the Focolare Movement, a non-profit corporation, P. O. Box 496, New York, NY 10021.

Subscription prices for one year: USA and possessions: US$12.75; Canada: US$15.00; Elsewhere: US$18.00; Air Mail (all countries): US$25.00.

An envelope is enclosed in each magazine for subscription orders and inquiries: LIVING CITY, P. O. Box 126, Jamaica, NY 11415.

© 1983 by the Focolare Movement, Women's Branch, Inc. All rights reserved.

$1.25
livingCity 11

OTHER EDITIONS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT MAGAZINE

CHINESE: "San Sing Seung Yuet Hong" - 70 ... loo Road 11 B/F - Kowloon - Hong Kong

DUTCH: "Nieuwe Stad" - St. Stephanusstr... - Nijmegen - Holland

A LIFE OF UNITY IS THEOLOGY: Two hundred theologians gather for a convention at Rocca di Papa, Italy.

22 *FAMILY LIFE: "One yes after another". The conviction of the love of God in every circumstance steers a woman through the loss of her husband and son.*

25 *MIRACLES NEVER CEASE: A teenage alcoholic's experience leads her to the discovery of hope.*

CONTENTS

Michael Genisio Mariapolis '83
COMING HOME! 2

Compiled by Guglielmo Boselli A LIFE OF UNITY IS THEOLOGY 13

OTHER DEPARTMENTS

MONTHLY WORD OF LIFE 20

EXPERIENCES OF LIFE 21

FAMILY LIFE 22

MIRALCLES NEVER CEASE 25

IMAGES FOR WORDS 27

ENCH:
Nouvelle Cité" - 131, rue Castagnary F75 015
s - France
Nouvelle Cité" - C.P. 636 - St. Jerome - P. Q. -
ada - J7Z 5T9

RMAN: "Neue Stadt" - Gleissnerstrasse 87 -
0 Munchen 83 - Germany

ITALIAN: "Città Nuova" - Via degli Scipioni 265
00192 Rome - Italy

PORTUGUESE: "Cidade Nova" - Rua Pio XII 274 -
Paraiso, Sao Paulo - Brazil

SPANISH:
1. "Ciudad Nueva" - Av. da Rivadavia 4939 - Buenos Aires 24 - Argentina
2. "Ciudad Nueva" - Ferrer del Rio - 1 esc A, 2º 5a

OTHER ENGLISH EDITIONS:
1. "New City" - 57 Twyford Avenue - London W3 - England
2. "New City" - P. O. Box 332 - Manila, Philippines
3. "New City" - 307 Balwyn Rd. - Balwyn North 3104 - Australia

Coming home!

Southwest Mariapolis

"It was like coming home! That's what coming to the Mariapolis was like for me."

I think that these words, spoken by a young man at the end of one of the 1983 Mariapolises, express something all of us felt about the Mariapolis: it was like coming home.

Each year the scene that meets one's eyes at the Mariapolis is different, but it is always colorful and full of life. There are children, teen-agers, college professors, factory workers, priests, religious... Some have been keeping this summer appointment faithfully for years; others are new, invited by a friend or perhaps by a poster that caught their eye. Each one would have his or her story to tell.

by MICHAEL GENISIO

The setting for the Mariapolis also varies from year to year and from region to region. It might be, as in Platteville, Wisconsin, a quiet campus in a small town surrounded by fields and farms. Or it might be, as in the case of Fordham University in the Bronx, a peaceful oasis amidst bustling city streets. The weather, too, is a variable. At the Bellingham Mariapolis, for instance, God's love came pouring down on the participants repeatedly.

But all this was merely a backdrop for the miracle we all experienced: that putting love for one another at the basis of every action brings, as a consequence, the presence of Jesus who promised "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst" (Mt. 18:20).

The presence of Jesus in our midst brought us joy, peace and a desire to love, and helped us to experience that we are all members of one family. Thus the kaleidoscope of ages, races and backgrounds was transformed into something of infinite beauty.

On the last day of the Mariapolis in Platteville, I noticed a new face in the auditorium and went over to say hello. The person turned out to be a student from the university there. He told me: "For four days I watched you people pass by beneath my dorm window as I was studying, and I said to myself, 'There's something about this group that's different from all the others.' Then yesterday, after my exam, I stopped two women and asked them who you people were. They invited me to come and participate." The student was a Muslim from Pakistan.

At the conclusion of the Mariapolis in Santo Domingo, where two hundred people participated, a young man said: "This meeting has been very important for me. Here I found the answer and the meaning for my life. I learned what it means to love in the truest sense of the word, without limits, with no strings attached."

Mariapolises have been taking place for more than thirty years now. And from the single Mariapolis that took place in northern Italy each year from 1949 to 1959, there are now well over a hundred Mariapolises yearly in more than fifty countries. This year the movement in North America organized five Mariapolises: in New Mexico, Washington, Wisconsin and New York for the United States and Canada, and in the Dominican Republic, for the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

The participants at the Mariapolis in Las Vegas, New Mexico came predominantly from California, Utah, Arizona, Texas and Lousiana. For almost all of them, the Mariapolis really began during the long bus or car trip to Las Vegas. "Therefore," one of them told me, "from the moment the first people arrived, there was already a festive atmosphere." Another of the participants at Las Vegas declared: "This has been one of the most beautiful experiences of my life! When I return home I hope to live the things I learned here."

The Platteville (Wisconsin) Journal, in a front page article on the Mariapolis, stated: "...people from all over the Midwest are participating in this week-long event...an experience of how life can be transformed if unity and love are placed at the basis of it."

Those at the Mariapolis in Bellingham, Washington came mostly from British Columbia, Alberta, Washington, Oregon and California. One participant said: "I feel the Mariapolis has given me practical help and ideas on how to live my commitment to Christ. It's been great!" And another declared: "The Mariapolis gave me a new sense of unity and how to achieve it." And a third: "I am once again amazed at the power of God and at the graces one receives in the City of Mary."

In the Dominican Republic the Mariapolis took place in Santo Domingo and was visited by Archshop Francisco Collaco-Blasco, Apostolic Nuncio to the Dominican Republic and Archbishop Nicolas Lopez Rodriguez, Archbishop of Santo Domingo who addressed the participants saying among other things: "The fact that Chiara Lubich and her first companions, during the war, found in the word of God the meaning for their life, makes me think that through the Focolare God wants to send, and is sending to today's world, a message which cannot be but heard.

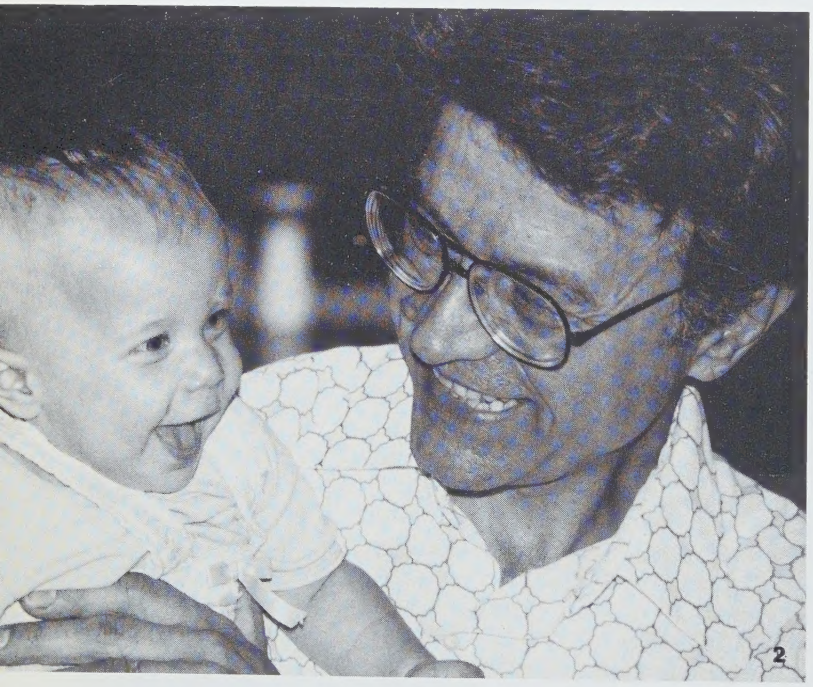
The last of the five Mariapolises was held in the City of New York. Just over one thousand people participated in it, a microcosm of humanity which made someone say at the end, "If unity was possible here then unity is possible among all people."

Many were the distinguished visitors at this Mariapolis, among whom Archbishop Pio Laghi, Apostolic Delegate to the United States; Most Rev. Frances Mugavero, bishop of Brooklyn; Most Rev. Joseph Pernicone, retired auxiliary bishop of New York, and others. The words of Archbishop Laghi to the participants were a great source of joy: "I know how much you love the Holy Father and how much the Holy Father loves you. This is the reason I have come here, in order to make evident the presence of Pope John Paul II amongst you."

The basic theme of the 1983 Mariapolis was unity. And unity was certainly what we all experienced: whether we were listening to the talks or to those who were sharing their personal experiences, whether we were playing or praying, preparing skits for the Mariapolis fest, or chatting as we waited in the cafeteria lines. We experienced what it means to live in a more united world, and we realized that it is well worth all the effort we can make day after day to make this a reality in our own corner of the world.

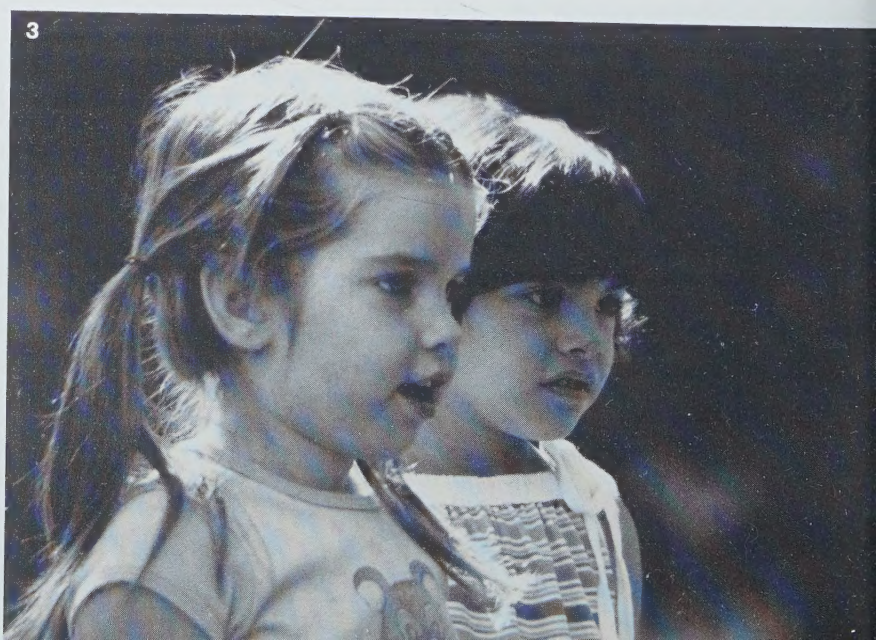
Moments of the Mariapolis

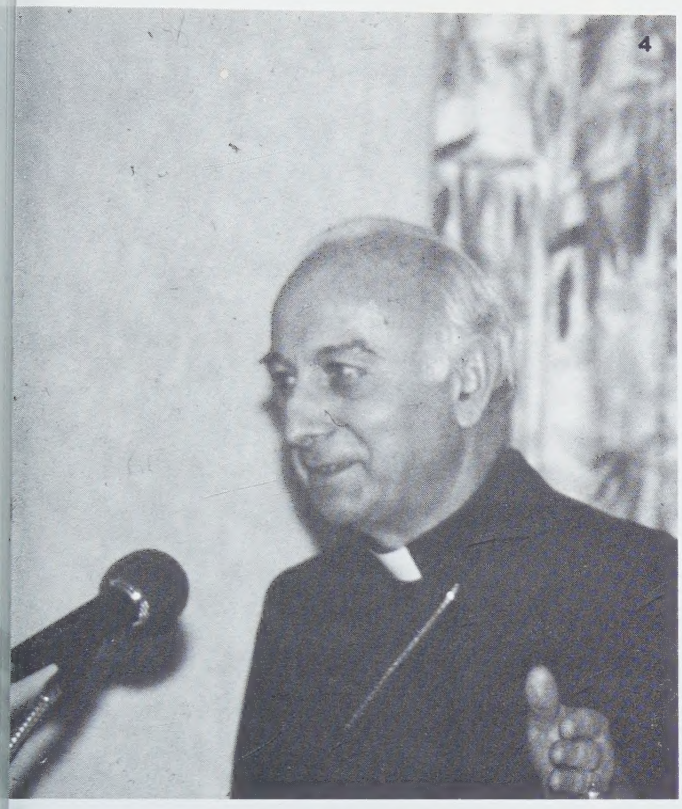
1,5,6,7) Games in the open and sharing at the Midwest Mariapolis.



2) Father and daughter at the East Coast Mariapolis.

3) Two young participants at the Southwest Mariapolis.





4) Archbishop Pio Laghi, Apostolic Delegate to the United States addresses the East Coast Mariapolis in New York.

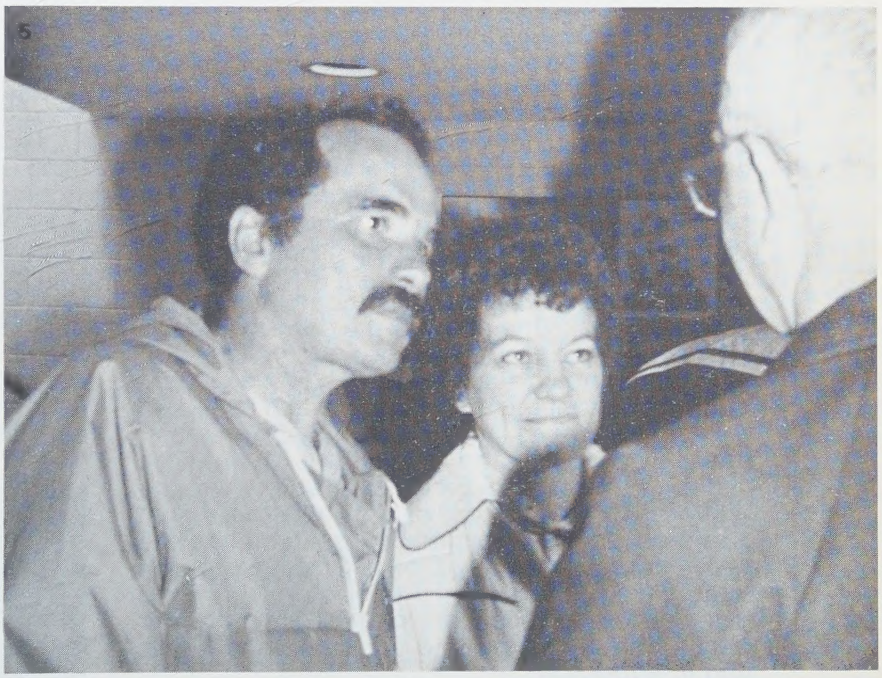
1) Most. Rev. Frances Mugavero, Bishop of Brooklyn celebrates Mass at the East Coast Mariapolis in New York.

2) Songs at the East Coast Mariapolis.

3,5,6) Moments at the Northwest Mariapolis.

7

4



5

6

For the first time this year a Mariapolis was held in Santo Domingo for the Dominican Republica and Puerto Rico.
4) Archbishop Francisco Collaco-Blasco, Apostolic Nuncio to the Dominican Republic arriving at the Mariapolis.
7) A young participant shares her experience.

mariapolis '83

The main theme of the Mariapolis was unity: "Working for a more united world." There were talks, experiences and presentations on this theme which is the goal of the Focolare Movment — to contribute to the fulfillment of Jesus' priestly prayer to the Father "that all may be one." The following meditation on this theme was written by Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement.

If you ever have the opportunity of going to the Holy Land in springtime, among the thousand things that Jerusalem offers for your contemplation and meditation, one is particularly striking on account of all that it records in its extreme simplicity.

It is a long stone stairway which has withstood time and has been washed by the storms of two thousands years. Here and there poppies break their way through the stone steps and their reddish color reminds you of the blood of the passion. Like a smooth, gleaming ribbon, the stone stairway solemnly weaves its way down towards the Kedron valley.

The stairway, which is framed on both sides by fields, has always remained open and exposed to the elements. It is almost as though no temple vault could take the place of the open sky which crowns the stairway from on high.

Tradition has it that Jesus walked down here on that last evening after supper when "he lifted his eyes to heaven" under a sky filled with stars, and prayed: "Father the hour has come" (Jn. 17:1).

It is a very strong experience to walk where the feet of a God have touched; and your soul almost pours out of your eyes as you contemplate the heavens which the eyes of a God have gazed upon.

It can create such an impression that your meditation leads you into adoration and keeps you in adoration.

His prayer before he died is unique. And the more this "Son of Man" whom you adore, shines as God, the more you feel his humanity and you find yourself in love with him.

What he said, only the Father fully understood, yet he spoke out loud, perhaps so that an echo of so fine a melody would reach us, too.

1943. No one knows why, but it happened that almost every evening the first focolarine[1], searching together for the love of God, used to read that passage (John, chapter 17) by candlelight since there was no electricity.

It was the Christian's "magna carta." From that passage, words that had been unknown to them shone like suns in the night; the night of wartime.

For three years Jesus had often spoken to many: he had spoken words from Heaven; he had sown in the hard heads of those around him; he had announced a program of peace, but he had offered his divine patrimony adapting it to the minds of his followers, and the parables are perfect examples of this.

But now he is no longer addressing an earthly audience; his voice is directed to the Father and he seems to hold nothing back.

That Man who is God is splendid; and like a flowing fountain of eternal life, he pours out water which plunges the soul of the Christian who is lost in him, into the boundless seas of the most divine Trinity.

The way he appeared in his final words is so majestic:

"I pray for them; I am not praying for the world... keep those you have given me true to your name, *so that they may be one like us*" (Jn. 17:9 and 11).

To be one as Jesus is one with the Father; but what did this mean?

We did not understand very much, but we understood that it was certainly something great.

That is why, one day, united in the name of Jesus, we gathered around an altar and asked Jesus to teach us to live this truth. He knew what it meant, and he alone would be able to reveal to us the secret for bringing it about. ▷

The stone stairway solemnly weaves its way down...

"But now I am coming to you ... *I say these things to share my joy with them to the full*" (Jn. 17:13).

Through the short experience of unity we had had, had we not experienced perhaps a "new" joy?

Was this the joy that Jesus was talking about? One thing we knew for certain — that joy is the uniform of a Christian, and inside us someone was showing us that joy is a duty for whoever follows Christ because God loves a cheerful giver.

"*I am not asking you to remove them from the world*, but to protect them from the evil one" (Jn. 17:15).

At least for us this life was fascinating and new. It meant living in the world which everyone knows is in contraposition to God, and living in it for God, on a divine adventure.

"Consecrate them in the truth; ... I pray not only for these but for those also who through their words will believe in me, *may they all be one...*" (Jn.17:17, and 20-21).

But what sort of Christianity had we lived before if we had passed by one another indifferently when we did not openly despise one another and judge one another, while instead our destiny was to join together in the unity Christ had prayed for?

Through these words, it seemed that Jesus was throwing a line to heaven and was binding us, the scattered members, together in unity — through him — with the Father, and in unity with one another. And the Mystical Body opened out to us in all its reality, truth and beauty.

"*Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you...*"(Jn. 17:21).

Just as Jesus is one with the Father so each of us should be one with Jesus and as a consequence of this, one with others; it was a way of life about which previously we had thought little or nothing: it was a way of living "according to the Trinity."

"*So that the world may believe it was you who sent me*" (Jn. 17:21).

The conversion of the world around us would be the consequence of our unity. It was perhaps for this reason that right from the very start of the Movement many souls have returned to God, without our having been concerned to convert them, but being solely concerned to maintain unity among us and to love them in Christ.

"I have given them the glory you gave to me... *may they be so completely one that the world will realize that it was you who sent me*" (Jn. 17:22-23).

Men would believe in Christ if we were perfect in unity. We therefore had to become perfect in this. We would have to put everything aside in favor of unity.

1943 was also the year of the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* in which Christ in Pope Pius XII echoed again his testament. Could it be that Jesus who lives in his head (the Pope) and in his body (the Church) had inspired us, too, to emphasize the need for unity and to give this gift to many people?

Unity, unity, all one! In times when Christ's fundamental idea, after being deformed and impoverished of the divine, was becoming the motivating idea for the atheistic revolution, God perhaps wanted to emphasize this idea for us in the Gospel.

We do not know. We only know that the Focolare Movement had that unmistakable characteristic and that, for us, nothing had greater value than unity because unity was the subject of the testament of the one whom we want to love more than anything else, and because from the experience we have had up to the present, unity is very, very rich and very, very full of fruits for the Kingdom of God, for his Church.

"*I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and so that I may be in them*" *(Jn. 17:26).*

"After he had said all this Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kedron valley...."

1) See inside back cover.

The following experience was recounted at the Mariapolis by Martha Jenkins from South Boston, Virginia. Martha is the wife of Rev. Blair Jenkins, an Anglican priest, and familiar figure at the Mariapolis, who died earlier this year.

I would like to share with you the experience of the past year of my life. I have known the spirituality of the Focolare Movement for about ten years and I think the experience of this past year would have been very different for me if I had not known and tried to live the ideal proposed by the Movement, that is, to put God in the first place in my life and live for him.

About the time of the Mariapolis last year my husband became ill. His only symptom was shortness of breath, but he was obviously not well and had to be admitted to the hospital. All the same, even though we couldn't go, we still felt that we were part of the Mariapolis that year and that all the participants of the Mariapolis were with us in a very special way.

After a couple of weeks of tests and waiting we received the diagnosis. They had discovered that Blair had a very rare kind of heart tumor, a malignant heart tumor. There is a certain horror that comes with the word "cancer" and we experienced that horror, but we lived through those moments with great peace and with a strong sense of unity. The love of God helped us through.

For the past ten years Blair and I would say to each other each day, "I am ready to die for you." And we would try to love one another with that measure — the measure of being ready to give our lives for each other. We didn't always succeed but we knew that we could always begin again and that was really the secret. So it was against this background that we received the news about Blair's condition and we tried to live the following months always believing in the love of God.

Blair's first hospitalization was at the local hospital in South Boston. It's a small hospital in a small town and as you know, in the South and in other places as well, blacks and whites don't always understand one another very well.

The doctor who saw Blair was filling in for another physician. He was a young black doctor from Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe used to be Southern Rhodesia and this young man felt he had suffered a great deal there at the hands of white Anglican missionaries. Blair was an Anglican priest, a white Anglican priest, and you could sense that this young doctor was caught in a dilemma — here was a patient that he liked very much but at the same time represented what had been a source of great pain in his youth.

Whenever we were together Blair and I always tried to be one so that Jesus might be present in our midst (cf. Mt. 18:20). We tried to love every neighbor with whom we came in contact. It happened that during the week Blair was in the hospital, our eldest son had a birthday so we invited the doctor to come in that evening for some birthday cake. He came and spent the evening with us. As he was leaving he said: 'You know, I have the feeling we shared communion here together." It surprised us because we hadn't spoken about that at all but it was as if the presence of Jesus in our midst had touched him in that way.

Then Blair was transfered to Duke University Medical Center and it took about a week to discover that he had a large heart tumor. It was then decided to immediately do open-heart surgery even though there were other complications as well.

I tried to pray for Blair, but I just couldn't do it because I knew that it meant being *with* Blair in trying to do whatever was the will of God and I was not ready to say "yes" to the will of God. I still had my reservations because this was my husband and I loved him and I wasn't willing to allow God to take him. I couldn't bring myself to that point. Also, since most heart tumors are not malignant I thought it would have been a very simple thing to take out. Blair was young and strong, so I was not seriously concerned for his life at that point.

On the morning of surgery though I suddenly found myself reliving the story of Jesus and the rich young man. Jesus had said to him, "Follow me," but the man had lowered his eyes and walked away because he was not able to give up his possessions. I realized in that moment that I was also very attached to my possessions — my marriage, my life with Blair, my family — and I had to choose. The choice was not for me to give Blair up to God; the choice was whether I was going to choose Blair or whether I was going to choose God. I didn't have to know the outcome of the surgery. I could choose God in that moment, and I did.

We were a little group waiting for the outcome of the operation. There was a priest and family members. A few hours later the priest was called into the area of the operating room. The surgeon came out and told him that the tumor was malignant. This was the news that he had to come out and tell me. I cannot describe the horror of that moment because I was completely unprepared for it. I couldn't believe my ears. Everything whirled around me for a minute — the children, the family, what was I going to do and on and on. In a very short time, somehow, something inside me said: "All you have to do right now is love Jesus in the person next to you." I looked around me. There was Blair's mother. He was her only son and I tried to understand what she must be going through. I was able then to live God's will throughout the rest of the morning and the whole day. I was certain that Blair was in the hands of a loving Father and that I didn't have to worry.

Blair bounced right back after surgery. The next morning I arrived at the hospital thinking he would still be unconscious. Instead he was wide awake, asking for his glasses, and 'where was I' and why didn't he have his breakfast. He was really his old self again and things looked very encouraging. We immediately renewed our pact of being ready to die for one another and it was said with an unmistakable new depth.

After six weeks the tumor had reoccured. We tried our best to

Rev. Blair Jenkins and his wife Martha at the 1977 Mariapolis held in Alfred, New York. At the end of the week they shared their experience with all the participants. Rev. Jenkins said: "We came into this community not knowing anybody except a few, and yet from the beginning we have felt very, very much at home, not because I'm a priest or anything that either of us are, but because Jesus in our midst made of us one family."

live the present moment as time went on and it was amazing to see the things that began to happen around us. Here was a parish that didn't have a priest anymore so the people within the parish began to minister to one another... They visited us often and visited one another. If someone in the parish became sick, others would go and see what needed to be done. They did those things that you would normally expect a priest to do. New life blossomed in the parish, and we really understood this to be a fruit of having embraced the suffering which we and the parish were undergoing. It wasn't just our suffering; it was everybody's suffering.

Blair had to go back to the hospital frequently and it was always something to see what went on around him. The nurses would greet him. People would stop me in the hall and say, "How can he be so cheerful and have what he has?" "How can he love other people that way?" And I would say that he tried to love Jesus in everyone. People recognized something there. They felt the fruit of our unity, not just between us, but the unity we shared with all the people in our Focolare Family. I think that Blair never prayed to be physically healed. He always said he wanted to do what God wanted him to do. What he wanted to do was to live God's will.

Our sons were able to care for Blair during this time, too. They saw how ill he was — he was in a wheelchair part of the time, and they helped him get in and out and took care of him with great love.

Our eldest son Sumner is an organ major at a music conservatory and he was going to present his junior recital in March. By that time Blair was beginning to have cardiac symptoms. The tumor had grown and the chemotherapy really couldn't control it but Blair was determined to go to our son's recital and his doctor said O.K. We went as a family and I think Sumner played better than he's ever played in his life. The last piece that he played was the Dupré' *Cortège et Litanie.* It's a funeral piece which begins very slowly, in a minor key, but the end is glorious — it is transformed into a major key and ends magnificently. Everytime I hear that piece I think of Blair's life because that's just the way it was.

One thing I realized was how much the quality of our relationship had been transformed during this time. We had tried to embrace every suffering moment by moment, and the constant effort to keep Jesus in our midst had somehow purified our love for one another to a degree which we had never experienced before.

Blair's death came quite suddenly just a few days after the recital, and I consider it one of the great blessings of my life to have been able to be there.

We had taken him to the hospital for another platelet transfusion. Almost immediately he suffered a severe allergic reaction. He was administered some medication but it didn't seem to have any effect. His teeth were chattering and at a certain moment he said: "Oh Jesus!" He said it in a way that I had never heard before because Blair would only say it when he was talking to Jesus in prayer. The way he said it now was like an outburst. One of the nurses asked: "What did he say?" And I said: "Well, I guess he's praying" because I really didn't know. Within about a minute he seemed to go to sleep and within another minute he gasped once and I realized he wasn't breathing anymore. To describe the way his body looked to me you have to think of those cars you may see at times out in the field when they've been abandoned because people do not need them anymore. It appeared just like that to me because Blair wasn't there in that body anymore. He was through with it and had gone on. I was sure that Jesus had come for him, and that he had said yes and had gone with him. ▷

mariapolis '83

We had a requiem for Blair and our Bishop came. In his sermon he referred to the Focolare Movement and spoke about Blair and I having learned to die for each other in order to bring about life. I was surprised to hear this because we had never really talked to him about it. But he had seen it and had attributed the peace and joy that we had to the unity which was brought about by mutual love.

For me it was like an Easter service. The church seemed full of light. It was just glorious. We sang Easter hymns and I felt that we had won. Nothing could separate us from the love of God, nothing, not the cancer, not the chemotherapy, not anything. Blair had won the victory. He was well — he was with God.

Soon afterwards I realized that I was not married any longer. Yes, because it says "As long as you both shall live." Our marriage relationship was over. At first I didn't really understand what was happening, but in thinking about it I realize that we had really been given the opportunity to live that relationship to the end. It was completed. It had not just stopped or ended: it had been completed with Jesus in the midst, as it should be, and I think I can say that we didn't waste any of it.

Below is another experience of unity shared by one of the participants at the Mariapolis.

I am a parish priest. One day our car broke down and we took it to the garage. The next day I was trying it out and it broke down again. I had serious doubts about the mechanic's abilities and I decided to speak very seriously with him about the problem because it involved a major repair and I thought that the money could be used for something else.

Then I remembered that phrase of the Gospel that says "Love your enemies" (Lk. 6:21) and I wanted to live it, but my first reaction was to think of the people that I wanted to use the money for. I also felt that the repairman was taking the job too lightly and that it wouldn't be done well. All of a sudden though it came to my mind that every person is a "candidate" to unity with God and neighbor—even my mechanic.

By the time I reached the repair shop my attitude was already different and I approached him ready to love. He told me to write down everything he said because I was going to have to buy many parts. As I was writing I remembered that I wanted to be ready even to give my life for him. When I finished he said, "I have to talk to you. I have a very big problem. In a week my divorce is coming through. I have two children. I don't want you to tell me that I shouldn't go through with it, but it's such a big problem that I had to share it with someone. I felt I could trust you."

I listened to him for about an hour and left without telling him anything. Once or twice, though, I passed by the shop and asked how everything was going. Every time it was worse.

One day I was walking back after having celebrated Mass very early in the morning. I saw someone that I knew from the parish, a person who likes to talk very much. I wanted to go the other way, but immediately I felt that that was not being truthful to the way I wanted to live. So I turned around and greeted him. He started talking and I wanted to love him by listening with all my attention but I realized inside that I was loving him so that he would hurry up and finish. I changed my attitude thinking, "I must love without any strings attached." Just as he finished talking a car came racing up. The driver saw me and stopped. It was my mechanic. I went towards him and saw that he was very upset. "What's the matter?" I asked. He told me that the night before he had had a big fight with his wife. He had decided to commit suicide and was driving on the left hand side of the road. He couldn't remember how long he had been driving around like this but no car had come his way yet. I calmed him down. After I had listened to him, I felt that I could tell him the truth. "You have a wound inside," I said, "and you can't run away from it. Neither can you solve it by hurting innocent people. The only way you can resolve it is to go back to your wife and talk it over with her. Try it!" He left without saying a word.

The next morning I heard a knock at the rectory door. There stood the mechanic with a big smile on his face. "I did it Father. I talked with my wife. We spoke about many things and I decided to begin again." We both rejoiced and he left to go to work. The window of the house was open and I could hear him talking out in the street. He had run into some friends who were asking him to come with them to have some fun. He spoke very sharply to them saying, "I don't want you to talk about these things to me anymore. Since last night I've decided to lead a different life."

Every once in a while I meet up with him and we talk. He says it's difficult at times but he still wants to go ahead.

Fr. R.V.

A life of unity is theology

compiled by GUGLIELMO BOSELLI

A convention of 200 theologians at Rocca di Papa in Italy. How does the life of the Trinity fit into our everyday experience.

On reading the history of early Christianity, we are amazed to learn that sometimes ordinary people like longshoremen, housewives, slaves and artisans were so involved in questions of theology as to quarrel over them. Today, in our secularized society, the very word theology is looked down upon as a matter of no concern, except to scholars, priests and nuns. And while it is true that there are lay people who are seriously attending the many schools of theology established everywhere after Vatican II, and while it is also true that there are associations and movements which give a solid theological formation to their members, still those who embrace theology as an integral part of their lives remain painfully few.

One of the reasons for this lack of interest may lie in the fact that theology is presented as an abstract matter, alien to time and space, and remote from people's everyday problems. Furthermore, most of the time the language used in conveying theological concepts is abstruse, way out of reach for people used to the down-to-earth, limited language fed them by radio, television, magazines, and movies.

And yet, the question of believing or not believing in God is something that has a deep impact on the life and destiny of each of us. Even though it does take an effort to expound this subject in greater depth (as does every attempt to give any of our convictions a cultural foundation), it is well worth doing for the very reason that it touches our most intimate selves.

A convention on this theme was recently held at Rocca di Papa under the title, "The Spirituality of Unity and Theological Reflections." Its purpose was to focus on the point that theology, rather than being alien to life, helps us discover its true meaning. The participants were invited to take a close look at the spiritual experience of unity of the Focolare Movement during its forty years of life, and to see what theological clues could be drawn from it within the framework of the Church's theology of which the spirituality of the Movement is an expression.

This, basically, was the topic of the two major talks, the introductory one by Giuseppe Zanghi and the concluding one by Marisa Cerini, both centered on the Trinitarian mystery, and both were based on the spiritual and vital elements contained in two conversations on unity presented by Chiara Lubich on video tape.

The other talks highlighted the contributions that this spirituality can make in various fields of theological thinking.

The Pope, in welcoming the participants at the General Audience in St. Peter's Square, expressed his good wishes that the work of the convention be "truly fruitful in view of an evermore convinced, generous, and efficient Christian testimony." Many noticed, in fact, that the salient characteristic of the convention was the presentation of a theology of life, the "communication" of an experience, which having been lived, acquired a more immediate understanding. One was helped to discern how intimately the life of the Trinity is linked to human relationships.

"In spite of the diversity of thought and personality among the people attending," observed a young German theologian, "this common awareness united us!"

Marisa Cerini's talk, based on the two video-conversations by Chiara Lubich, someone said, "proved that in matters of theology, women make a great contribution — something that perhaps hardly ever happened in the Church before." A Swedish nun said, "For years I have tried unsuccessfully to find someone who could help me understand the trinitarian dimension of our life. An Orthodox priest told me once in Berlin that this was a deep gap in Catholic theology. Now I'm happy to have found people for whom the future of theology lies in its trinitarian aspect."

It is a vision which, according to an Irish teacher of dogmatics, helps open new perspectives on the preparation for the priesthood. He stated: "Interpersonal unity, which has been discussed and which I have found here, can furnish a theological model helping us to approach the mystery of the Trinity. It is a reality which I must live if I want my students to better understand it."

GIUSEPPE ZANGHI:

Why a convention on theology?

We asked a few questions of Giuseppe Zanghi, one of the organizers of the convention, which he opened with the keynote speech entitled, "Life of Unity as Theology."

Question: First of all, why was this convention on theology held?

Answer: For a very simple reason: every great spiritual reality, every charism of the Church, is nothing else but a 'word' that God addresses to mankind in a given moment; it is a word of the Gospel applied to a particular time in history. So are the religious movements developing within the Church today, and so is our Focolare Movement. Theology is man's reflections on the word of God, on the fact that God is speaking to us, and on the things he wants to tell us. It is therefore our thinking within the framework of another theology, which I would call "Divine Theology," and which is God's own revelation to us.

The tragedy we live today is that in different fields of science, the knowledge which has been developed is detached from Revelation. We lack the mediation of theology to help us understand how every science in its own sphere could express the good news that Jesus brought into the world. In order for the word of God to enter this reality, we do need this theological mediation.

Question: Why did you choose to talk about the mystery of the Unity and Trinity of God?

Answer: It is not really so. We told ourselves: Our Movement is now over forty years old; its spirituality has a deep ecclesial value, and it has an originality. It contains strong ideas and inspirations — as for instance, unity, Jesus in the midst, Jesus crucified and forsaken. We felt the time had come for us to begin to express with the language of theology, which is one of the sciences of human knowledge, that even greater theology, which is the spiritual one, and which constitutes the life of the Movement. Every authentic spirituality draws from the various categories of human thought at a given time in history — not in a passive way; it adopts them, transforms them and thus becomes itself a vital force in the process of human thought.

We already attempted to do this sporadically in the past. Now, we feel, the moment has come to make more systematic attempts with a precise follow-up and development. We told ourselves: we could take one point of this spirituality and look at it from the theological point of view. For instance, we could take

the point of unity, and think about it. But we realized that this work required not only a deep spiritual maturity on our part, but an equally deep theological knowledge enabling us to re-elaborate theological categories. However, we did not feel that we were equipped yet to do that at this point.

We therefore proposed to try another way — to take a theological concept (obviously one particularly inherent to our spirituality) and see how we could confront it with our present, limited theological competence and with our experience of life.

Therefore, our theme, "The Spirituality of Unity and Theological Reflections," was chosen not so much for speculating on what theological thought may contribute to the spirituality of unity, but to see, on the contrary, how the spirituality of unity may find a place in theological thought. And, as we tried to find out what actually has guided us in our experience of unity, we immediately considered the Unity and Trinity of God. For when it comes to unity in the Christian sense of the word, the model for its actualization is the Triune God.

Question: But isn't the topic of the Trinity one of those subjects that are very far removed from people's mentality today?

Answer: I would say that the opposite is true. This was confirmed by a professor of sociology present at the convention. As a sociologist, that is to say a person used to thinking from another point of view, she told us that she has come to understand more in depth something she already knew, namely that the way we think about social issues is determined by the way we think of God. This means that those who have a monolithic idea of God, will tend to look at society from a non-trinitarian monotheistic point of view, percieving social structure as monolithically unitarian and pyramidal, without articulation and without pluralism, a society in which those who are farthest from the summit of the pyramid become socially insignificant. Historically this was the case in Egypt, in Babylon, in the Hindu caste system, and in France during the reign of Louis XIV, the Sun King. Instead, those who think of the Absolute as Trinity, project this vision into the social system and discover society in all its complexity of articulations, and become aware of the balance that must be found between multiplicity and unity, between the voice of the individual and the voice of the collectivity. They see societies as communion, in a relationship of giving and receiving, which makes them one with each other.

As I said at the beginning of my conversation, I think that the great challenge that modern culture poses to the Christian world is exactly this: to see if the latter will be able to bring about this trinitarian unity, which is its specific nature.

Theology, today, is in fact rediscovering the importance of the question: What is the Christian Absolute? In all the writings of theologians concerned with the

A trinitarian vision of Christian life has important effects on ecumenism. Chiara Lubich and the Orthodox Metropolitan Gennadios Zervos, during an ecumenical convention at Rocca di Papa, Italy.

Giuseppe Zanghi (left), Bruna Tomasi and Monsignor Albert Rauch of Regensburg, during a break at the Theological Convention at Rocca di Papa, Italy.

signs of our time, we often read, nowadays, that trinitarian theology has not been given its rightful place, and must therefore be reinstated. These theologians feel that if we have reached a crisis in the contemporary world, it is because the Trinity has been given too little space in Christian thought. We are therefore no longer talking about a remote topic, but about a vital and central issue of our times.

Question: Do you feel, therefore, that there is a close link between the reality of life and theology?

Answer: Certainly. Behind theology as a scholarly pursuit — the one studied by theologians — there is another theology, which is the very life of the community. Theology means, first of all, the word of God — God who speaks. We ourselves are the words created by God. While our thought, when expressed, is always abstract, the thought of God is never abstract; in the Trinity, the expressed thought of God is the Son, who is a Person. And when God creates, his thoughts are the very things he creates. *We*, therefore, are words spoken by God; the words, however, must be composed in a certain way to form sentences which make sense. If we take a grammatical sentence, we see that it is made up of different words, but it is the verb which ties them together and gives them meaning. In the same way, people should be aware that they are words of God, but that it is Christ, the Word (Verbum), present in their midst, who links them to one another and makes them a discourse of God. The theologians, who are themselves words of God, meditate on this reality, and the outcome is theology as a science. It would be a mistake, however, to lose sight of the fact that this theology is contained in the other one, the theology of God speaking to us. If one does not approach the science of theology, enlightened by faith and grace, he or she will not be able to hold a "true" theological discourse. Talking about God, then, has meaning only within that great theology, the one I called "Divine theology," which is the discourse of God, of whom we are spoken words, which take complete meaning because of the presence of the Word in our midst.

Question: Will this convention have a follow-up?

Answer: We would like to think of this convention as a begin-

ning, and not as an isolated event. In giving my final impressions, I expressed the opinion that one reality still needed attention — the reality of the person. In this sense: anyone who wants to talk about theology must obviously begin by talking about God (and this is what we did), but the great love of God is humanity; this is why the topic on God should automatically lead to the topic on the person. This is another reality which must be recaptured in a new theological dimension. People should be percieved in the context of their everyday life and according to the divine plan for them.

We have started out in this convention with the spirituality of unity of the Focolare Movement, and from there branched out into the discourse of the Triune God, and in this context we were led to consider the true value and meaning of the person. Now in the future we will have to develop this topic on the person, and we will do it by focusing our theological reflection on the cross, on Jesus Crucified and Forsaken. It is here that the discourse of God reaches out to the persons in their imperfections, their wounds, their hurts, their everyday life.

We hope, then, that our future conventions on theology, will deal with the existential dimension of the person in a theological sense, and then branch out into the many fields of human knowledge. But, I repeat, we will always try to base our reflections on that theology which is discourse of God. Otherwise we will lack the foundation which is needed to understand humanity which has meaning only because of the Word.

MARISA CERINI:

The experience of the Trinity in the Church.

Marisa Cerini presented the final talk of the convention, entitled "The Trinity and the Church." It was a theological reflection based on the experience of the presence of Jesus in the midst, as it has been lived in the Focolare Movement.

Question: "Jesus in the midst" is a fundamental aspect of the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. How is it related to the mystery of the Trinity?

Answer: First of all, I wish to emphasize that the concept of the presence of Jesus in the midst — which, in the words of Chiara Lubich is "a mystery very easy to live, yet supernatural " — has entered the Movement, not as a result of reasoning or meditating, but as a result of experience. Chiara and her first companions lived this "mystery" with its impact and its fruits, without realizing, for some time, that what they were experiencing was the presence of Christ as described by Matthew in the famous verse 20, Chapter 18. It was only later, that they became fully aware of this. From the very beginning, however, they had embraced the idea of responding to the love of God, who had manifested himself as Love and as Father, by accepting his will as expressed in the Gospel and by making a radical commitment to live Jesus' commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12), with the readiness of giving their lives for one another.

But who can accomplish this kind of unity? Christ alone. Only he can make two or more become one, and it is the Holy Spirit who acts among those thus united, filling their hearts with the love of Christ. This love, which is complete self-denial, and which is present in those "who make themselves one" with the others, "helps them to enter deeply into the hearts of their brothers and sisters." "Christ then, and with him the Father, lives in them and among them;" the whole Trinity abides in them. Their relationship becomes trinitarian: "I in you and you in me."[1]

It is through mutual love, which leads to unity, therefore, that we can most fully experience, in the Church, the trinitarian life which has been given to us with Baptism and the other sacraments. Christ, present among us when we are united in him, is in the Father, and so we, being in him, are in the Father. In him we have entered into the relationship among the Persons of the Trinity.

The *perichoresis* of the three divine Persons (the Greek term for interpenetration, mutual donation, acceptance of one another), which is founded on the unity of their nature and implies

the unity of love, remains an unfathomable mystery. Yet we can have an intuition of that mystery when we think of what happens in us, even though mysteriously, as we participate in that reality as a free gift of God. And that particular mystery offers a solution, the only solution to the question, present in every aspect of human life, between oneness and multiplicity.

Of course we, human beings, cannot interpenetrate each other as the three divine Persons. God, however, can penetrate us and make us one. It is the Risen Jesus who penetrates us, makes us one and dwells among us. And we, loving one another with his love which he has bestowed on us, can mysteriously be one in the other: I (with you and Jesus in me) — you (with me and Jesus in you) — and Jesus among us in whom we both are."[2]

Such mutual, even though imperfect *perichoresis* between us is possible only by way of the communion which takes place between the Trinity and us, through Christ: "I living in them and you living in me (Jn. 17:23); "I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you" (Jn. 14:20). That is to say that unity among us can be realized only in God. He alone can make it a reality; it is his gift. It is he who makes it possible through Christ and through the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit, in fact, who makes us one with Christ and, in Christ, makes as one with the Father and with one another.

The rightful source of this unity is the Eucharist. Before asking the Father for unity, Jesus gave us the Eucharist, so that by nourishing us of himself, he may make us himself. In the book *The Eucharist*, by Chiara Lubich, we read, "By means of the Eucharist he united Christians to himself and to each other into one single body, which is his own body. As a result, he gave the Church its most intimate and essential life: the Church is the body of Christ, and reflects brotherhood, unity, life, and communion with God."[3]

The Trinity, therefore, is the source, the model, and the ultimate goal of the unity among us.

Living the new commandment, living with Jesus in our midst, is being all one: one Christ, yet distinct individuals, each of us another Christ; this is living with the Trinity as a model.

Question: Isn't it true that the doctrine on how the relationship among the Persons of the Trinity is projected on human relationships is still in its early stages in theology?

Answer: Yes, that is true. And yet the life of the Trinity is, and has been, the foundation and deepest reality of the life of the Church. "I living in them and you living in me" (Jn. 17:23) is a reality even in the smallest cell of the mystical body. In Vatican II, more than ever before, the Church was presented as the "the Church of the Trinity." The Church is the family of God, a mysterious extension of the Trinity in time, which not only prepares us for the life of unity in heaven, and not only gives us full assurance of its reality, but

At a recent Theological Convention at Rocca di Papa, Italy, Marisa Cerini gives the concluding talk entitled, "The Trinity and the Church."

Photo by Mario Ponta

also allows us to be part of it even now.

On the other hand, as we have often heard, the Church is only "one." Wherever it appears, it is all entire and undivided, even where only two or three are gathered in the name of Christ."[4] This also explains the relationship between local and universal Church: wherever there is a local Church, there is "the" Church.[5]

The relationship between the local Church and the Universal Church is a trinitarian relationship. Every local Church must be Church, and therefore, there must be unity of its members with Christ and among themselves. The local Churches are Church in the fullest sense of the word when, through their own bishops, they are in unity and in communion with the Pope and with all the other local Churches.

The episcopal collegiality too is, and must be lived, in the image of the Triune God. It "fulfills its purpose only if it serves that fraternity which is the Church, and if it also works as a fraternity within itself."[6]

Question: Do trinitarian relationships clarify in any way the function of the various charisms and the many religious orders, associations and movements within the Church?

Answer: In living the trinitarian mystery, each plurality in its diversity fosters its own deep unity when the single components work together towards building the totality, which in turn bestows its own riches on each single component. All charisms are gifts of the one Spirit; they bring about an immense good for the Church if thsoe who are bearers of these charisms live in deep unity and communion with their bishops and among themselves.

This is also the case of theological pluralism. Paul VI said that a balanced, theological pluralism "finds its roots in the very mystery of Christ, the inscrutable riches whereof (cf. Eph. 3:8) transcend the capacities of expression of all ages and cultures."[7] In order to bear fruit, theological pluralism requires a dialogue among the theologians and with the teaching Church, a dialogue patterned on the mutual giving and receiving which is characteristic of the Trinity. As Origen would say: it requires unity so that Jesus in the midst may give his light to help the theologians penetrate his truth.

Question: How can a trinitarian vision of Christian life affect the ecumenical dialogue, the dialogue with other religions and with all people of good will which Vatican II encouraged?

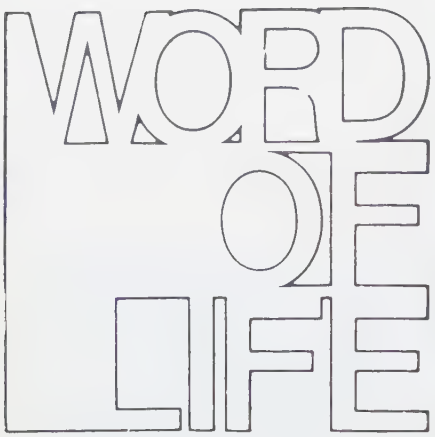
Answer: We know that there can be the presence of Jesus in the midst of Christians of different denominations. If we love one another, he in our midst will help us to overcome the theological differences that still exist and to achieve complete unity. It is therefore necessary to continue the theological dialogue, but in the trinitarian dimension we have spoken about, and in the framework of the wider dialogue of charity that urges us to be the first to love, helps us to discover the richness of one another's beliefs and acknowledge all that unites us, and leads us to respect the identity of one another's Churches and give witness to the whole world of Christ's presence among us.

About the dialogue with members of other religions Monsignor Rossano writes that "in the nature of interpersonal relationship which is characteristic of the Christian faith"... we can see that we are all called to "a new rapport with God and with our brothers and sisters, in a form that transcends the orbit of all religions, because it is anchored in the mystery of the Triune God, transmitted to mankind through Jesus Christ. This new rapport, far from destroying the pre-existing religious heritage, purifies it instead and extends it towards hitherto unknown horizons."[8]

Finally, in the dialogue with all people of good will, Christians will give due witness of their Triune God if they live all aspects of their life in a trinitarian way.

For the early Christians, the unity of their hearts was reflected in the fraternal communion of goods and of their entire life. "In the midst of the society in which they lived, they brought and demonstrated a new lifestyle ... a new type of society, a community in which the trinitarian roots of human coexistence acted."[9] □

1) Cf. Chiara Lubich, "L'Unita" in J. Povilus, Gesu' in mezzo nel pensiero di Chiara Lubich, *Rome: Citta' Nuova Ed., 1981, pp. 11-12 and 67. (Own translation).*
2 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
3 Chiara Lubich, The Eucharist, *New York: New City Press, 1977, p. 63.*
4 Cf. O. Casel, Il mistero dell'Ecclesia, *Rome: Citta' Nuova Ed., 1965, p. 181.*
5 Cf. Chiara Lubich, Yes, Yes, No, No, *New City London, 1977, p. 88.*
6 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Il nuovo popolo di Dio, *1969, p. 235 (own translation).*
7 Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, Reconciliation within the Church, *Dec. 8, 1974. English translation from* L'Osservatore Romano, English Edition, *Dec. 26, 1974.*
8 Msgr. Rossano, Il problema teologico delle religioni, *Catania, 1975, p. 46 (Own translation).*
9 Pope John Paul II, The Gospel is life for souls and all of society, *address to the New Humanity Section of the Focolare Movement English translation from* L'Osservatore Romano, *English Edition, April 18, 1983.*



"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the desires of the flesh."
(Rm. 13:14)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the desires of the flesh.

Who said these words, and to whom were they addressed?

The Apostle Paul wrote them to the Romans at the conclusion of an exhortation. Using the image of night and day and applying it to Christian life, he wrote that the present time is like a night drawing to a close, and the day of salvation is at hand.

It is the hour therefore, to rise and lay aside the works of darkness - sin, and put on the armor of light - good works.

For St. Paul, putting on good, doing good, is synonymous with putting on Jesus Christ, his way of doing things.

Just as when night is over we get up and put on garments suitable for the life and activity of that day, in the same way, preparing for the dawn of our day of salvation, we must "put on" Christ.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the desire of the flesh."

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ..."

How can this be done? Baptism is the sacrament which enables us to put on Christ, transforming us into him (cf. Gal. 3:27). Perhaps the expression, "put on", alludes also to the practice of putting on a new garment at the moment of Baptism, as a symbol of the "new life" which the Christian receives, a garment which should remain intact to the end.

For Paul, however, to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" means much more: in Baptism we undoubtedly put on the person of Christ (in the sense that being baptized into Christ Jesus, we die with him and rise with him, that is, we die to sin and participate in the new and real life of the Risen Lord); but we could lose this new life through sin.

We must remain faithful then to what we have become through Baptism and live according to the criteria of the new existence we have entered into. And this is necessary because as with every other life, this new life must grow in us, and grow to the point of reaching complete similarity to Christ.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh."

"...And make no provision for the desire of the flesh."

Christ first of all means that we cannot follow that which opposes the spirit of Christ. That is, we cannot follow the desires and inclinations of the flesh (used here in the negative sense).

In the same letter St. Paul gave a list of negative consequences of a life lived according to the flesh: excess in eating and drinking, impurity, quarreling, jealousy, all manifestations of selfishness, because if we live according to the flesh we think only of ourselves, of our personal comfort and satisfaction.

Christians must abandon all this and lead a life in conformity with the life of Christ, according

to his Spirit, the fruit of which is, instead, love, unselfishness, constant service to God and neighbor.

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the desires of the flesh."

How can we live this word of life well?

How can we put on Christ?

We must make our choice with courage and renew it often, each time as if it were the first time.

Let's live as Christ would, which means, let's love.

These words of Paul can then be decisive for us as they were for St. Augustine. When he read them, he felt as if he had been invaded by "a light, almost, a certainty" which eliminated his last doubts and hesitations about radically changing his lifestyle, and thrust him on his way to sanctity (cf. Confess. 8:12).

If we let our hearts be filled with the love which comes from the Holy Spirit then disordinate desires will disappear; there will be no more room for selfishness.

It's not that we have to do great things. It would be enough if everything we already do were suggested and animated by that true love which has its roots in Christ.

Doing this, we will help ourselves and society around us to become free from the poison of selfishness which divides and destroys. We will then be able to give our contribution in building the civilization of love which unites all people to the Father and with one another - the civilization of that love in which each person is fulfilled according to his or her own true dignity.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

AN UNEXPECTED RESPONSE

A little girl who lives next door to me went through a terrible crisis after her parents were divorced. She seemed withdrawn, and would stiffen her body if you tried to hug her. She would hold her head down most of the time and would easily get angry at the least provocation. My six-year-old daughter has established a good relationship with her and, realizing that her friend is very sad, my daughter has made a great attempt to love this child for the past two years.

She had become a little more relaxed with me, too, although she never really accepted any affection. One day I made a real effort to "make myself one" with my daughter and her little friend. I got involved with their games and, although they were quite demanding of my time, I was able to continue to love. At one point our little friend asked me to spell my name while they were coloring pictures. A little later she handed me a picture of a flower; on it she had written: "I love you Rosemary." I was so delighted to see her response to the love I had shown them throughout the day that I bent down and gave her a hug. With this she responded with a big hug and three kisses. Her stepmother was so surprised, explaining that this child never kisses anyone, not even her own relatives.

I felt grateful to God who, becoming "one" with us, has shown us how to love.

R. R.

A VALUABLE LESSON FOR ME TOO

Last night my husband and I discovered that one of our children had gotten into our desk and cut up all the stamps. At first we were boiling mad and called all the children upstairs to find out who the culprit was.

Our six-year-old son reluctantly admitted his guilt. As my husband sent the others away, I made a quick prayer for help because I knew too well what a nightmare it would be if we let our tempers get the best of us. The word of life came to mind: "If anyone loves me he will keep my words, and may Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him" (Jn. 14:23). Suddenly I could see clearly what had happened. My son, who really enjoys cutting paper, had cut the stamps while they were in an old envelope. He thought he was just cutting an old envelope and no harm would be done. I took the opportunity to explain my understanding to him and also to explain the importance of checking with dad or mother before touching things in our room. He really understood and was genuinely sorry, and we felt he had learned a valuable lesson. It was surely the presence of the love of God that calmed our tempers at the same time, even though we never said a word to one another.

L.S.

MEETING GEORGE

Working in a small office in downtown Chicago, I frequently have the occasion to meet a variety of people who come to our door. One morning the only other person in the office was busy with a sales representative. When I heard a knock, I immediately went to the door. I met George.

George was about six foot, in his mid thirties. He wore an old suit about three sizes too big for him. His hair was cut very short. When he spoke, his vocabulary and choice of expressions indicated that he was perhaps unaccustomed to dealing with upper level management.

He was seeking work and so I invited him into my office — in spite of several pressing deadlines I had to meet. I immediately told him that there were no positions available in our office. But I tried to show some interest, personally, asking him about his experience and his efforts to find work.

Then I tried to identify myself with his experience. Only shortly before I had also been unemployed for six months. So I could understand his predicament very well. Discouragement and a sense that one's abilities cannot be marketed might set in. In fact, this is often just below the smiling face of someone seeking work. I shared my experience as an unemployed person with him. I tried to encourage him and even offered to contact an acquaintance in his field of endeavor.

Two days later he called me on the phone asking me why I had dealt with him in that way. Usually people simply say "No," and close the door. I hesitated, trying to word my response appropriately. During that hesitation he interjected, "Are you a Christian?" I answered, "Yes."

B.N.

FAMILY LIFE

Weakened family life is one of the greatest social ills of our time.
The "New Family" Movement has as its aim to bring the Focolare spirit of unity into family life, so that each family will be deeply united within itself and with other families.

ONE YES AFTER ANOTHER

In 1971 my family and I moved to Zambana, a small village in the Dolomite Alps, in the northern part of Italy. Many joyful years were passing; our six children were growing beautifully.

I am Catholic and have always attended Church regularly. One day at Mass I heard a priest speaking about the love of God with words that deeply touched me. He reminded us that God is Love. In that moment I remembered words that I had read in the past: "Love is certainly a wonderful thing. 'But — we wondered — what must God be like who created it?' " [1]

That encounter marked for me the beginning of a new life. Through that priest I met members of the Focolare Movement. They helped me to understand better that I had to respond to God's love by putting him in the first place in my life and by doing his will in each moment. I also learned that in order to love God I had to serve him in each neighbor, putting into practice the Gospel sentence, "...in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40).

This way of thinking changed my attitude towards my family, first of all. It was not easy because my family was quite large. I had been trying to raise my children with a strong hand, demanding respect from them, but now I wanted my every action to be an expression of love.

I started to listen more to them and to lower my voice when speaking. They perceived this new love, becoming more open with me, sharing their problems. I was more available to them, and we often found solutions together.

There was a lot to be changed in the relationship with my husband also; I had often been intolerant of his behavior. When he spent too much time with his friends, I used to explode, nagging him about everything that I found unacceptable in his actions. Things had been so bad at a certain moment, that I had even considered leaving him. Now I became more understanding, more sensitive to his needs.

Eraldo, my husband, soon realized that something had changed in me; he began talking about it with his friends. One day he brought me a bouquet of flowers; I was really touched because I knew it was not like him. For instance, I had always thought of myself as an introvert. I had an inferiority complex; I was unable to have a rapport with others or to assume certain responsibilities but I had made no effort to improve myself, thinking that one's nature cannot be changed.

Now I started to spend more time with people, greet them warmly, and listen to them. In so doing I became aware of many of my neighbors' problems and needs.

I accepted membership on the Parents Council for the class of my youngest child, and I discovered that I was capable of taking initiative, contrary to what I had always thought. I also accepted an invitation to teach catechism and to become active on the Parish Council. Logically, I still had difficulties in overcoming my insecurity and shyness, but the constant effort of starting again and of mirroring myself in the words of the Gospel gave me courage and light.

Then a terrible event occurred. It was the evening February eleventh. My husband and Vittorio, our fourteen year-old son, had driven to the market to do some shopping for our newly opened pizzeria. I was preparing dinner. It was getting late but I was not concerned that they had not yet returned. I thought, "Maybe they stopped to visit some of our relatives on the way home."

Around 8:00 p.m. our daughter Alexandra called and said, "Mom, Dad was in an accident. Ivano (another one of our children) recognized the car on TV while watching the news. Our car crashed with another; three people are dead and two badly injured."

It was a terrible shock. I could have fallen apart but inside of me something was giving me strength. Spontaneously I prayed for Eraldo, Vittorio and for myself; I asked for the grace to live well that moment of great pain and suffering.

We closed the pizzeria and informed our pastor and relatives; I decided not to tell Eraldo's mother for the moment. We made phone calls to get more information. At first no one was able to tell us anything: then came the terrible truth. Eraldo was dead and Vittorio was in the intensive care unit at a hospital in the city of Verona.

Again I turned to God with all my soul; I wanted to believe in his love even if the situation seemed absurd. They drove me to the city of Bolzano where the body of Eraldo had been taken. Ivano and some other relatives went to Verona to see Vittorio. On the way I offered my great suffering to God for all of humanity, so that Jesus' prayer, "That all may be one" may be fulfilled.

At the hospital they uncovered the face of Eraldo for me. It is difficult to express what I felt in that moment: sorrow, pain, anguish...yet, at the same time, a strength and a peace that could have come only from God.

As I was about to leave, I met the relatives of the other two victims. One lady was crying desperately as some people tried to console her. I approached her, embraced her, and told her that I understood her sorrow. In a loud voice she cried, "My husband was my all! Do you understand? My all!"

I felt peace and serenity within me because I knew that "my all" was God. An immense gratitude filled my heart for the people who had helped me discover that God is Love and to give him the first place in my life, preparing me, therefore, for this painful moment.

Our pastor accompanied me home in the car. On the way we prayed for Vittorio. The pastor told me that many young people had gathered together to pray as soon as they had heard about the accident.

At home there was no time to close myself in my sorrow; I had to be love for my chidlren who were anxiously waiting for some news. I told them that Dad was gone, but that I had seen him, and his face was calm and serene. I felt that my words consoled them a little.

Later my son called from Verona to inform us that Vittorio was in a coma.

At midnight the doorbell rang; it was Emilio, an old man for whom Vittorio had worked during the summer. He had also met my daughters who had joined me in the adventure of living the Gospel. In spite of the fact that he was not a believer, he had been impressed by our way of life. As soon as he had heard about the accident, he had taken a taxi and had come to our house. Handing me some flowers, he apologized for arriving so late and added, "I felt that I had to come immediately because this is also my family."

The next day we hurried to Verona, where Vittorio was still in the intensive care unit. I saw

Elsa Moser:
"All the happy moments of my life were nothing compared to the deep and intimate joy that I had felt in those moments when stark suffering had opened my soul to a more profound communion with God."

him breathing and felt relieved. But soon I realized that it was the artificial lung that was keeping him alive. We took turns entering the room. He was so beautiful; he seemed to be smiling. I caressed and kissed him. From the depth of my soul I prayed to God, "Not my will but your will be done, Lord, whether you decide to leave him with me or take him with you." In the hour that followed I felt again the same sense of gratitude for those people who had helped me understand the meaning of suffering: to accept it as something positive rather than just being resigned to it. In other words, I had learned to carry the cross, not drag it.

Quite a few of those friends sharing the same ideal of life were spending that evening with me. A phone call interrupted our conversation and I was informed that Vittorio had joined his father. I think that only the love that surrounded me sustained me through those moments. In that atmosphere I found myself saying, "I believe that Eraldo and Vittorio are in heaven, not so much because of their merits or ours, but for the solidarity and prayers of all those who love us."

During the funeral I had the impression that my husband and my son were alive in our midst. The whole ceremony expressed joy and gratitude and, without realizing it, I began singing with the others; those songs were not just words, but rather the expression of a tangible divine reality. Later on many people said, "The funeral was not a sad service: it was like a feast." It was the same for us because Eraldo and Vittorio had reached the house of the Father.

All the happy events of my life were nothing in comparison to the deep and intimate joy that I had felt in those moments when stark suffering had opened my soul to a more profound communion with God.

Elsa Moser

---

1) Chiara Lubich, **That all men be one,** *New City Press, New York, page 66.*

Miracles never cease

A teenage alcoholic tells the story of how she found hope in the love of God.

I was only fourteen, and I was flattered! My elder brother had asked me to join him and his friends at the bar on a Sunday to play cards. In fact it wasn't just playing cards — we would drink too. One, two or three mugs of beer, and sometimes a glass or two of wine. We were expected to pay our way — luckily for me by the time it was my turn I'd won enough money for my round.

This meant a lot to me, I was the youngest but I didn't want to be looked down on. Without noticing it, as the time went by I got used to the system, and I became a teenage alcoholic.

I left school and I trained as a nursery nurse. When the training was finished I decided that from now on there'd be no more drinking. "For the sake of the children," so I thought. It didn't work out — every Friday, as soon as I left the nursery the old urge returned and I felt myself losing the strength to resist. I wondered about changing my friends, so I went to a Jazz Club instead of to the pub. This didn't help much, I hadn't been there long before someone offered me some pot, and I had a smoke with him.

The next evening I was back, trying to fill the emptiness with pot. All this did was to increase the urge for more drugs; from pot to pep pills. For a time I was on top of things; but not for long. I was soon back to being miserable, and all the time I had a nagging question inside "What's the purpose of it all?"

One of my lecturers at the Extension Studies Course must have noticed that all wasn't well. "How about going abroad for a year?" was the question; I jumped at it, it was just what I wanted, and the experience matched up to the hopes. I got on a plane for Greece.

In the mornings I worked at a Greek-German Nursery and in the afternoon I did some private tutoring, and I was well off. The surroundings excited me and every weekend I flew off to a different island with a pocket full of money and the prospect of a good time.

But I was lonely, I felt much as I had felt at home. I still felt drawn to the drink, maybe just to drown the same old nagging question: "What's it all about?" One evening, when I was visiting a museum I got to know a young Sudanese, a negro. My friends didn't like this at all. "A black man, of all people!"

My reaction was one of disappointment, I thought they'd have been more broadminded; "They say they're Christian and yet they are so hypocritical and intolerant." I had to admit though that my relationship with Mohammed wasn't all I made it out to be. During the week he was about his business, I was never sure what it was, only that it was a bit shady, and at weekends we'd hang around the taverns, drinking to pass the time. Deep down I felt that there wasn't much to it apart from our need to fill empty time and to exploit each other.

I was fed up and frustrated; I lived in a doctor's house with access to all sorts of drugs and I'd thought of committing suicide, only at the back of my mind that old question was still there; "What's it all for? Isn't there something better, some other way for me?"

The answer came — but in a way I'd never expected.

One night I was walking along a lonely back street in Athens when suddenly two men jumped out from a dark corner. From what I gathered of what they were saying their plan was to abduct me, and I was frightened. I struggled like mad and then I felt a knife being pushed into my back. I felt a paralyzing pain and the blood spurted out. They must have been frightened too because they ran away.

I found a taxi and the driver took me to the nearest hospital where they cared for me. I was sure I was going to die and I began to pray: "God; if you're there; don't let me die like this.

O God; if I hadn't wasted so much of my life!"

A few weeks later I returned to Austria and got a job in another kindergarten. In a strange way, although God was still a mystery to me I wanted to talk to the children about him. It was around Easter time, so I asked them: "Why do we celebrate Easter?"

The next day we sat on the floor and I listened to their answers. Some said, "Because Jesus is Risen." One of them wasn't so sure; "Who's Jesus?" he asked. Then we opened the Children's Bible and I read to them, simple explanations of the Christian faith. It was so strange; as I did this I felt within me a peace I'd never known before. I was moved to see how wonderful the children thought it was as we read of Jesus making the blind man see and the lame walk.

Was I one of those blind and lame? I felt that the children were giving me something that had been missing from my life.

After Easter I received a letter from the local authority asking if I would like to go on a training course to study speech therapy and how to work with handicapped children. I welcomed the chance, I had always wanted to do something like this.

The new routine and the hard work of studying helped me to make a new start — no more bars; but it didn't last all that long. I was soon back in the old way of coming to class with a hangover! I just couldn't break out of the vicious circle, and yet in the R.E. lessons I felt a longing to find out more about God, if only I could see the way!

Once, in a sociology class, we were asked to say what were the most important events in our lives. One of the students, named Heidi, said: "The most important moment for me was when I met real Christians for the first time."

It struck me that I'd never met any of these, not real ones. Show me some! I decided to watch Heidi more closely, maybe I'd find what I was looking for. She was very quiet, she didn't say much. Maybe it was because she was the eldest in the class or had become more settled and peaceful with those extra few years.

But although she didn't say much, what she did interested me. It seemed to be second nature to her to help; to clear the tables, to wash up and to polish. All I ever seemed to do was to lash out with my tongue at anyone who dared argue with me!

"Do you really think that you've always got to be right?" asked Heidi one day in her quiet thoughtful way.

"I'll have to watch her, maybe respect her," I thought, "she has the courage to contradict me."

We had a free period the next day and I saw Heidi busy working away behind a pile of books. "Heidi, would you like to come for a walk?" I asked.

My thought was that this would test her Christianity, having to stop what she was doing just to go for a walk.

She smiled at me, left her books and came with me.

I started to ask her questions; What did she do with her spare time? Why was she always so tranquil?... As we parted I felt that this meeting was the chance I had been looking for!

A few days later Heidi gave me a book; "What began in ruins" it was called. "This is the story of those Christians I've been telling you about," she said. As I traveled home on the train that afternoon the three quarters of an hour journey was, for the first time ever, too short.

It was a wonderful story, more exciting than a detective novel! At home I told them, "Genuine Christians really do exist!" They looked at me as if I had two heads!

From then on I was so happy; for the first time for a long while I could see things more clearly.

Next day I invited Heidi to come for a cup of coffee with me, and I told her of my discovery.

"Jesus must love you a lot," she said, after she'd thought about it for a while. I wondered if that could be true; I wasn't all that good, more a good-for-nothing; could he love me in spite of it all?

That afternoon, traveling home on the train I could have cried for joy! It just seemed as if Jesus was sitting next to me; I could really speak to him. It was clear; it didn't matter who I was or where I was, He loved me. But would he always be so close? Could he give me the strength to give up drinking?

"If you love me," I said, "then please don't ever let me go."

For the first time in years, that evening I went to the pub and didn't drink any alcohol.

When I went in, there was a game of football on the television. "Would you like a beer or a glass of wine?" the barman asked.

"Neither," I answered, "could I have an orange juice?"

My friends swung round in their chairs, they looked at me as if I'd gone mad!

"Are you ill?" one of them asked. "No," I replied, "I just want some extra vitamins!"

They turned back to the game, so did I; but it didn't matter to

(Continued on page 28)

United Nations/Photo by O. Monsen

(Continued from page 26)

me who won the match, I'd won my first victory over myself!

But it wasn't all that easy: to give up like that has side effects. Sometimes it was terrible, I felt in deep depression and my whole body trembled. "Well," I said to myself, "if this is the way Jesus takes me, I'll happily pay the price." The more I broke away from my alcoholism the more I began to see the needs of other people and want to do something about them.

One of the most surprising of these was at home. One day I came home at about midday. I was really tired and I wanted to rest. Quite by chance I looked into the kitchen and there I saw a pile of dirty dishes.

My mother was already having a rest, she suffers from arthritis. I stood in the kitchen and I looked at the dishes. "Shall I wash them or not?" I thought.

I decided to wash them.

Then I saw that the floor was dirty, but did I have to do that? "I'll do that too," I thought; and I did it reminding myself that enthusiasm alone doesn't make a Christian.

After a while I heard my mother getting up.

"Would you like to have a cup of coffee with me?" I called upstairs.

"You must be joking," she said, "How can I find time to drink coffee? I've got to wash the dishes in the kitchen, and do something about the floor, it's filthy."

I had to grin to myself; and mother opened the kitchen door and stood as if rooted to the spot.

"Miracles never cease!" she said, flabbergasted.

I tried to laugh it off, and I gave her a cup of coffee. **C. H.**

ORDER NOW

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER

For TEN NEW subscriptions you receive ONE FREE

This offer expires December 31, 1983.

Living City is something special . . .

and it's the perfect gift

for anyone on your list.

Use the enclosed envelope to order your gift subscriptions. A gift card will be sent in your name to the recipient.

Subscription rates:

United States	1 year (11 issues)	US$ 12.75
Canada	1 year (11 issues)	US$ 15.00
Elsewhere	1 year (11 issues)	US$ 18.00
Airmail	1 year (11 issues)	US$25.00

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

FOCOLARE ADDRESSES IN NORTH AMERICA

CHICAGO:
P.O. Box 53426
Chicago, IL 60653

SAN ANTONIO:
P.O. Box 32302
San Antonio. TX 78216

NEW YORK:
P.O. Box 496
New York, NY 10021

BOSTON:
P.O. Box 239
Roslindale, MA 02131

WASHINGTON, DC:
P.O. Box 4958
Washington, DC 20008

LOS ANGELES
P.O. Box 71701
Los Angeles, CA 90071

TORONTO:
P.O. Box 302 — Stn.T
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M6B 4A3

LIVING CITY IS...

LIVING CITY IS...

LIVING CITY IS...

something special

For subscription, please use the enclosed envel

LIVING CITY
P.O. Box 126
JAMAICA, NEW YORK 11415

Non-Profit Or
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 42
Long Island City,

0184 21115L00000572
GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION
LIBRARY-SERIALS DEPT
2400 RIDGE RD
BERKELEY,CA 94709

PRINTED IN U.S.A.